

**Testimony on behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board
Before the Appropriations Committee
IN OPPOSITION TO
An Act Implementing the Governor's Proposed Budget Recommendations
for Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)
February 23, 2017
Gerald Duggan, Enfield CT**

Senators Osten and Formica, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Gerald Duggan and I am here to ask you to not cut funding to any mental health services and agencies. You may consider that we do have a budget to cut to make more profits elsewhere. However, this is not savory for all. I represent a group that has been discriminated against for a long time now. We share stigma together and sometimes alone. Many people think of us as insane criminals or ticking time bombs or just nuts who belong locked up in a cell somewhere with a strait jacket so no one else must deal with us. However, we prefer to be out in the open and to enjoy life like everybody else, preferably without medications, but I won't get into that mess here. No, what I'm trying to express here is what will happen if you decide to cut corners on a circle that we put our lives into.

Every day we struggle. Yes, some people take advantage of the system. However, this isn't new to humanity and besides, it's not a lot of people who do this. Very few honestly. Most of us scramble by just to make it until the next month when our money runs out like it was never there to ever begin with.

You may ask yourself, well even if that's the case, what good is the mental health agencies and programs providing? Well, honestly, I don't want to fool around with you here, it could be a lot better if we had more funding. Ludicrous you may exclaim! Well, honestly, a well-oiled machine is better than a rusty one with missing parts. You wouldn't buy a car if it ran like junk, right? Well, it still gets us by from A to B, but it could be a lot better. But it does so much good, just as is.

We're not asking for a limo or a hummer, we're simply asking to not get a lemon is all.

Now what services can be provided? I won't get into that. What I will tell you is a scenario and I just want to mention a few things before I get to that. I'll try to keep this as short and as sweet as possible. I've been getting a lot of help from Community Health Resources. Their help has been phenomenal! I've been attending North Central Regional Mental Health Board meetings. And have been receiving a lot of information to help me understand a lot of areas where we need the most help in. Help as in funding but as well as areas to improve in those services, such as what clients need more of. Whether it be whoever to whatever to whichever from wherever. The Regional Mental Health Board needs support! Housing helps too!

Okay, I won't get into too much with those things, just wanted to give them a shout out. What I'm really going to focus on here is this:

Do you like crime?

Do you like wasting money?

Do you like homeless people?

Do you like opium-related deaths in an epidemic form?

Do you like stigmatizing people with important illnesses that should be taken as seriously as cancer or diabetes?

Obviously no, you don't at all.

Well, I've done a little research and have found that the number of crimes committed by mentally ill people is very small except, we're most of the time the victims of a broken society, police officers who do not know how to appropriately handle difficult or complex cases with those who suffer from mental health issues, a lack of education or any real aid to a lot of people with mental illness but nowhere to go, or those who have fallen through the cracks of the system, who are now homeless or in a rough shape with possibly drug related issues, but are also prisoners of their own minds' illnesses. Families struggling to take care of their children or relatives or friends who have chronic illnesses. People who got kicked out of a high-maintenance institution who now just want to find a cure, but because of a budget slicing, are doomed. Not only that, but since Sandy Hook, that tragic day, I had to listen to the media call someone like myself a threat.

I know plenty of people who have mental illness who wouldn't harm a fly, and wept for the family involved just be considered a threat.

We are all humans. We should try acting like it more.

If we got proper funding, you would go down in history as an aid, an angel, angels, in a pioneer process to help us all be a little better off.

I beg of you, do not be on the wrong side of history today. We're already suffering here. However, I know it is a tough decision, but if I had more time, I'd identify every single thing wrong with cutting our funding. Despite that, I know it's your choice, and I hope you are able to sleep well with that decision. I know by standing before you today, I will.

Thank you for your time and consideration for hearing me out. Have a wonderful evening, please be safe, and take care.